

CHAPTER 3, CRITERION THREE

TEACHING AND LEARNING: QUALITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT

The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Southwest Minnesota State University offers a range of degree programs and options designed to fulfill the needs of southwest Minnesota and students who attend SMSU from other parts of Minnesota, other U.S. states and several other countries. One hallmark of SMSU's approach to this part of its mission is to recognize needs in the region and design programs to fulfill these needs. The RN-to-BSN program is only the latest example of this creative energy. From 2-year Associate's degrees through Master's level degrees, SMSU offers the following distribution of degree options:

Associate in Arts	1
Associate in Science	4
Bachelor of Applied Science	4
Bachelor of Arts	19
Bachelor of Science	33
Graduate Certificate	1
Master of Business Administration	1
Master of Science	3

Courses and programs are offered in a variety of formats as well, including on-campus, hybrid, and online courses, 2+2 undergraduate degree programs in partnership with a number of community colleges, dual credit arrangements with high schools across the state, and online, cohort-model, and learning community graduate programs. In keeping with its mission, the University strives to offer programming that is accessible and meets the needs of its regional stakeholders. Continuing to do so with constricted funding has been a challenge, but the University continues to meet that challenge by growing new programs where appropriate and collaborating interdepartmentally as well as with other institutions, the System Office, and regional organizations. Emphasis has been placed on growing these kinds of collaborations as the University moves into the future, as evidenced in the Strategic Plan's directive on community partnerships and President Gores' focus on the theme of "Meaningful Partnerships and Engagement."

The University is careful to ensure quality across all of these initiatives. Quality of the programs is monitored through processes such as program review, ongoing assessment efforts, and program accreditations. The revised Liberal Education Program (LEP) provides a high quality foundation for SMSU students, a foundation further guided by the AAC&U's high impact practices (*link*), many of which are embedded into the LEP. SMSU's faculty are highly involved not only in developing curriculum but in shaping policy and engaging in campus governance; they take the rights and responsibilities of providing quality instruction very seriously. SMSU also offers a variety of student support services that help students throughout their time at the University, with services targeted to the different populations' needs.

CORE COMPONENT 3A: THE INSTITUTION'S DEGREE PROGRAMS ARE APPROPRIATE TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

3A1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.

SMSU ensures that its degree programs are current and appropriate for undergraduate and graduate education in several ways. The initial curriculum design and approval process, annual data collection and periodic program review process, and the annual department report process (see Criterion 4) all provide checkpoints for appraising program offerings in light of accepted standards. For the curriculum design and program review processes, programs are expected to compare their course offerings and requirements with similar programs at other MNSCU institutions in particular and with national expectations. Furthermore, some programs undergo accreditation or certification processes from national organizations and/or require students to meet licensure standards or pass certification tests. All students must meet graduation requirements pertinent to their degree programs. In addition to the measures listed above, currency is also supported via the annual faculty evaluation process. All of these aspects related to currency and appropriate levels of performance are described in detail below.

CURRICULUM DESIGN AND REVIEW PROCESSES

The curriculum approval process, described in Criterion 2A, is the first step in making certain that courses and programs are appropriate to the level of degree. SMSU has two separate curriculum committees, one for undergraduate curriculum and one for graduate curriculum. Creating a separate graduate curriculum committee was recommended by the 2004 HLC reviewers and established shortly thereafter. Each of the curriculum committees reviews all proposed classes and programs, scrutinizing the proposed syllabi and requirements. Only graduate faculty are allowed to serve on the graduate curriculum committee. In the case of new programs, once the proposed program has been approved by SmSUFA and the SMSU administration, a new program application must be made to the System Office; depending on the type of new program being proposed, it might also need to go through the HLC substantive change process. These external reviews provide another initial layer of examination for currency and appropriateness.

The program review process is an important source of ongoing evaluation of currency and appropriateness. The two key elements in program reviews at SMSU are the annual collection of data and the periodic evaluation, which includes a self-study and outside consultant evaluation. SMSU Policy A-004.1, Academic Program Planning and Review Procedures, describes these processes; this policy was initially adopted in November 2002 and was updated in 2007 and again in 2013, reflecting SMSU's ongoing attention to the importance of program review and its refinement of the processes. The related document, *A Guide to the Annual Collection of Data for Programmatic Review*, is available in the Office of the Academic Deans. The Data Management and Institutional Research (DMIR) Office plays a key role in distributing data to the departments. A large share of DMIR's functions were previously in the Office of Research and Institutional Grants (RIG). RIG distributed an annual "Datum," a collection of key data points for the overall university and for each department. Upon retirement of its director in 2005, the University opted to create a Chief

Information Officer position to lead RIG's functions and future information technology services planning and operations. Concurrently, the previous Computer Services department was reorganized into a new Information Technology Services division. Recognizing the growing importance of data-driven decision-making and data management, the DMIR office was created within Information Technology Services and an Interim Director was named during the 2007-2008 academic year. Upon the offering of an early separation incentive program across the University during the 2009-2010 academic year, the Interim Director and the DMIR Research Analyst both retired at the end of that year. Prior to their retirement, a new Director of Institutional Research & Reporting Services was hired. While DMIR continues to exist, the Director himself now reports to the Provost. The office is also staffed by two Database Programmer/Analysts who report to the Chief Information Officer. The Office provides each program data in areas that include demographics, enrollment, and fiscal resources. In addition, each program is required to assess the effectiveness of its academic offerings through measurable learning outcomes and report on those in its annual report. This annual data collection constitutes part of each program's ongoing assessment activities; this process is described more thoroughly in Criterion 4.

The periodic review process also helps to ensure that courses and programs are operating at the level appropriate for the degree being awarded. The periodic program review is conducted on a five-year cycle. The periodic review includes components focused on the curriculum, students and faculty, distance learning, service to the campus, and other relevant aspects of the program's activities. To complete the self-study portion of the review, all of the program faculty must work together to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their program and consider what improvements they might need to make. In addition, faculty must identify, with the approval of their academic dean, an outside reviewer who will study their draft report, interview students and faculty, and review the physical resources available to the program before submitting a separate report with their evaluation and recommendations. The program faculty then submits a written response to their academic dean. The response addresses in detail the recommendations of the outside reviewer and describes strategies they plan to implement as a result of the self-study process. For more information on the periodic review process, see Criterion 4, Section 4A.

While program review documents indicate that SMSU's programs compare favorably with comparable programs at similar institutions, faculty members are expected to identify areas for improvement and adjust their curricula accordingly. For example, the Music program made several changes related to the performance of its students at the appropriate level of rigor based on its last self-study, which was conducted not only for University program review purposes but as part of the Music program's accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). Following the self-study, the music theory curriculum was made more rigorous. In addition, the courses were altered to create greater continuity in course structure between the freshman and sophomore year. Finally, a fifth theory course was added that is dedicated to the study of Form and Analysis. Previously, the review found, this content was covered in a less effective way as part of a four semester sequence.

In addition to the program review process, programs are encouraged to align their courses of study and their educational standards with those set forth by their disciplines' professional organizations. This occurs when designing a new program; for example, the curriculum for the Exercise Science degree was designed, in part, to prepare graduates to be eligible to take and pass the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) Health Fitness Specialist (HFS) certification exam. This exam is an industry standard for credentials in the field and requires a baccalaureate degree or higher from an accredited college or university with a major in exercise science, or equivalent. The Speech Communication program is an example of how an existing program uses evolving national standards to refine its offering in an on-going fashion: the program relies in part on

curriculum recommendations from the National Communication Association in designing and refining their course offerings and evaluation standards. The revision of the writing courses in the Liberal Education Program provides another example, as the new curriculum design was informed by national standards set forth in the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ “Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.” [\[link\]](#)

PROGRAM ACCREDITATIONS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND LICENSURE

Several programs on campus are required to or choose to go a step further through program accreditation, approval, or licensure requirements. The Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in Music are fully accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music. The Council on Social Work Education accredits SMSU’s Bachelor of Science in Social Work. During the 2014-2015 school year, the RN-to-BSN program will be pursuing accreditation from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, the first year that the program is eligible. The Chemistry program is approved by the American Chemical Society, meeting their requirements for rigor.

Social Work and Education majors must pass exams in order to be licensed as social workers or teachers in the state of Minnesota. Both programs prepare students for licensure through their program requirements. Students graduating in Social Work take merit exams after leaving the University but before being allowed to practice. In 2008, a survey of two cohorts of Social Work alumni showed that 60% were licensed as social workers at the bachelors level, and the remaining 40% were working in areas which would require them to have passed a merit exam in order to work in that specific field. The area of practice can vary; as noted in Table 3.1, alumni had passed merit exams in the wide variety of areas listed:

*TABLE 3.1: CURRENT FIELDS OF PRACTICE FOR TWO COHORTS OF SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES 2008**

Current fields of SW practice at work	Responses	
	N	Percent
Crisis Intervention/Information & Referral	10	9.9%
Family Service	8	7.9%
Education/Training	6	5.9%
Mental/Behavioral Health or CMH	10	9.9%
Child Welfare/Child Protective Services	8	7.9%
Alcohol, Drug or Substance Abuse	6	5.9%
Health/Medical Care	7	6.9%
Group Services	5	5.0%
Housing	4	4.0%
Grief/Bereavement	3	3.0%
Violence/Victim Services	4	4.0%
Public Assistance/Public Welfare	2	2.0%
Aging/Gerontological SW	4	4.0%
Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities	5	5.0%
Community Planning	2	2.0%

Income Maintenance	3	3.0%
Corrections/Criminal Justice	4	4.0%
Adult Protective Services	3	3.0%
Rehabilitation	3	3.0%
School Social Work	3	3.0%

* Respondents may have more than one field of practice

Education students in particular must pass a series of tests at several stages in their educational journey en route to licensure. The Education Department, in addition to aligning their program standards with recommended professional guidelines, must also comply with rules established by the Minnesota Board of Teaching. Given the regularity with which the Board of Teaching revises its requirements, this means the Education faculty and the students they advise are in a virtually permanent state of adjustment to remain in compliance at all times. The Education Department also sets its own standards for admittance into their teacher education programs, including minimum scores on the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exams (MTLEs) Basic Skills Tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, and students must meet minimum standards ('C' or better in all education courses, completed all coursework toward their degree, have a cumulative GPA of 2.8, and have no incompletes) before they can move forward to student teaching.

Currently, prior to licensure, candidates are required to pass MTLE tests in Pedagogy and in Content in each area of licensure. The Board of Teaching decided to require the MTLE exams in Fall of 2010, as these exams are intended to be aligned to the MN standards, rather than using the Praxis tests that are used by about 37-38 states for licensure. The state is still in transition regarding this change, with passing scores on the Praxis Basic Skills tests still being honored through Dec. 2015 (passing scores on the Praxis Content and Pedagogy tests were allowed through Aug. 2012). Since the MTLEs have been implemented, they have been surrounded by controversy as there was very little practice information available for the first two years, and the Board of Teaching set the pass rates at 1 standard deviation higher than what the assessment company experts recommended. This has resulted in very low pass rates around the state, and in May 2013 the legislature required that a task force be developed to look into all of the issues surrounding the MTLEs.

In addition to the MTLE exams, candidates are now also required to complete the edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment) during student teaching before they can receive licensure. The EdTPA is scored by Pearson, as part of a collaboration with Stanford.

Education students generally take their licensure exams while still at the University; the passing rates for these students in demonstrate that most students are meeting the requirements for licensure, as noted in Table 3.2:

[INSERT TABLE WHEN DATA AVAILABLE]

FACULTY REVIEW AND CURRENCY

The annual faculty review process includes within it assurance and evidence that faculty are keeping current in their areas of expertise and in what they teach in their classrooms. Per the IFO contract agreement, all fixed-term and tenure-track faculty members must annually set goals and then report at the end of the year on their progress on their goals in five criteria areas; the third criterion is “Evidence of Continuing Preparation and Study.” The IFO contract describes several forms of evidence for this criterion, including “remaining current in one’s professional discipline and/or special field of study,” “engaging in structured study leading to development of experimental programs, curricular proposals or revisions, and ongoing revisions to course syllabi or instructional methods,” and “reflecting currency in the discipline or its pedagogy.” Thus this annual process specifically addresses currency. The Deans read and respond to every faculty member’s initial plan and progress report.

Courses and programs are on the whole consistent with current expectations in each academic discipline. The combination of annual data collection by each program with the 5-year program review cycle also provides faculty members in each program with the opportunity and the means by which to ensure that each program keeps up with changes.

3A2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.

Closely related to the description above in section 3A1 regarding how the University ensures that levels of performance by students are appropriate to the degree awarded, each program has learning goals appropriate for the level of degree indicated. SMSU offers undergraduate and graduate degrees and one Master’s level certificate in Autism. As noted in Chapter ? Response to the 2004 Review, one concern noted in 2004 was the lack of separation between undergraduate and graduate processes and policies. Following that review, SMSU created a separate graduate curriculum committee. Thus all new courses are now reviewed by the appropriate undergraduate or graduate curriculum committee via the curriculum proposal process described in Section 2A and referenced in Section 3A1. More specifically regarding learning outcomes, course outlines including learning goals and typical assignments are required documentation in this process, and the appropriate curriculum committee reviews this material and discusses the proposal with the applicant. In the case of 400/500 level classes in Education, students taking the courses at the 500-level must meet higher standards for graduate-level credit and complete additional assignments. Further, the University has also since updated its graduate policies (see [A-045 Graduate Policies and Procedures](#)); the Graduate Council Committee facilitates the work related to these policies. In addition, the periodic program review process (see Section 4A1) and ongoing program assessment efforts (Chapter ? Criterion 4) help assure that appropriate learning goals for all programs are in place.

3A3. The institution’s program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

Regardless of location or delivery method, an SMSU course is guided by the content and learning objectives intended for that specific course, and in keeping with a program’s goals. Different methods might be used to achieve the course goals, but an online section, for example, will meet the same learning outcomes as a face-

to-face section of the same class. An online section might utilize videos and required discussion board postings and interactions compared to in-class discussion in a physical classroom setting. SMSU has a variety of tools available, most notably the Desire2Learn (D2L) course management system for use by all sections regardless of distance or on-campus setting, and Adobe Connect, which has replaced the interactive television (ITV) system used for distance learning in the past. Beyond the institutional measures in place to ensure consistency, such as the curriculum proposal and assessment processes described earlier, a number of faculty interested in teaching online participated for several years in a book club dedicated to the topic of online teaching, helping the university to develop a core of faculty who understand the complexities and challenges associated with teaching across different modalities. (A list of the books read and faculty who participated is available in e-resources.)

In addition to delivering courses in face-to-face traditional settings on its campus, SMSU reaches out to students across the region through off-campus and distance learning programs. The following programs are delivered to students at remote sites either online, through learning communities, hybrid courses, or through special arrangements:

- Undergraduate programs in Early Childhood Education and Management through Distance Learning (2+2) and the RN-to-BSN program
- Graduate programs in Business Administration and Education
- College Now (SMSU's dual credit/concurrent enrollment program)

Within each of these programs, learning goals have been constructed appropriate to the level of the degree program, as with any on-campus program, and strong effort is being made to ensure that all learning goals are achieved no matter the delivery method or location. The successful 2011 Change Request ([link here](#)) for expanding online education documents much of these efforts; more information on each is described below.

UNDERGRADUATE DISTANCE PROGRAMS

2+2 programs, also known as Undergraduate Distance Learning, provide students the opportunity to take additional courses to earn a bachelors degree. Since the last HLC review in 2004, SMSU has added more partnerships with community and technical colleges within the state, for example with Mesabi Range Community and Technical College in northeastern Minnesota, and Dakota County and Hennepin Technical Colleges in the Twin Cities, giving their graduates the opportunity to continue their education toward a baccalaureate degree. Currently SMSU partners with nine two-year institutions to offer the 2+2 bachelors program in Management (see this link for the list of institutions: <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/distancelearning/?id=4615>) and 11 two-year institutions for the 2+2 bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education (full list found at <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/distancelearning/?id=4544>).

Students in 2+2 programs first complete an associate of arts, associate of science, or associate of applied science from approved technical and community colleges. The junior and senior years are completed by enrolling in SMSU major classes. All classes are now delivered online. This represents a shift from an earlier interactive television (ITV) approach that was used until 2008. The shift from ITV to a web-based delivery approach was driven both by cost factors and by quality considerations. Operating the ITV system required the live presence of a tech support staff member for each class meeting—in both or all locations. Since many of the ITV courses met in the evening, this represented a significant outlay of resources. At the same time as

the cost was becoming significant, the quality of online meeting software and its ease of use made this option more attractive. The combination of higher ITV costs and better online quality eventually resulted in the change of delivery platforms. 2+2 courses are planned and delivered by the relevant SMSU academic departments, with off-campus courses following the same learning goals and objectives as on-campus courses. The same curriculum as outlined in the academic catalog is followed for the online programs as for the on-campus programs.

The dean of the College of Business, Education, and Professional Studies (BEPS) meets regularly with the distance learning coordinator to monitor the consistency and quality of all programs. The coordinator also checks in with administrators and students of the two-year schools when she visits campuses to ensure that they are happy with the quality of distance learning programs.

In 2013, SMSU began offering an RN-to-BSN degree. This particular program is designed for working RNs. Most of the courses are offered online. There are five nursing courses throughout the program that are taught in a hybrid format, for which students come to campus once or twice during a semester with the rest of the course taught online. Whether fully online or hybrid, courses meet the intended learning outcomes, which have been developed to also meet the standards for accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), which SMSU is pursuing in 2014-2015 (the first year for which it is eligible to do so).

GRADUATE DISTANCE PROGRAMS

The different graduate programs at SMSU utilize a variety of methods to ensure that the University meets the needs of its constituents throughout its broad geographic region, with each program meeting the same learning goals as its on-campus counterpart.

SMSU offers a cohort-model MBA in which all of the students enroll and graduate together, typically from off campus (although an on-campus MBA is offered as well). Each of the eight required core courses in the program is regularly taught both on campus and through web conferencing, specifically Adobe Connect. Courses taught in either format are identical in all respects except for where the students are physically located. The four elective courses are taught online. Because students often work together in teams on class projects, the cohort approach guarantees that students share similar learning experiences and gain contacts and relationships that could be of value to students in their professional careers.

The Education Department offers several graduate programs. The Master of Science in Education is offered both on-campus and via distance learning modes, depending on the program. Six emphasis areas are offered: English, English as a Second Language (ESL), Mathematics, Reading, Sports Leadership, and Teaching, Learning, and Leadership. The English emphasis is fully online; the Math emphasis offers its core courses online and the Math emphasis courses on campus in the summer. The remainder are all hybrid programs, with course meetings on campus and on the D2L course management platform.

The Teaching, Learning, and Leadership emphasis is also delivered via a learning community format. The learning community studies together for two academic years, meeting an equivalent of twenty times, or ten weekend meetings each year. The classes meet 8 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturdays and 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays. Students are expected to implement strategies and activities which were covered in class or in readings into their classes each month, and they have to report back to their cohort groups, called Advisory groups and Job Alike groups, about those implementations. During the month they are also required to read and reflect on one book and multiple articles. Just as the on-campus students in the program do, they prepare

multiple group presentations over the four terms, are responsible for development of a portfolio that demonstrates how each has met the National Teaching Standards and the SMSU Leadership standard, have a final portfolio review in their last term, and prepare a presentation of their Action Research, which is presented at the annual learning community research conference at SMSU. Students use D2L, Google Docs, and Wiki as sites for hybrid activities that occur between meetings. Meeting dates are determined by the members of the learning community and usually are scheduled during the academic year, August through June. The learning community locations change as needed every two years depending on demand. SMSU's Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) (located on the HLC website at http://ncahlc.org/component/com_directory/Action,ShowBasic/Itemid,/instid,1408/) reflects these learning communities as "additional locations," although they are not campuses, merely meeting sites for the groups, and change periodically.

SMSU also offers a Master of Science in Special Education. Students in the program have the following licensure options: Developmental Disabilities, Early Childhood Special Education, Emotional Behavioral Disorders, and Learning Disabilities. Students can also choose a licensure-only option or a Master Level Certificate in Autism. All Special Education core classes are taught as hybrid classes with Saturday meeting times in addition to the required online coursework.

The Master of Science in Physical Education: Coaching of Sports is a fully online program that advances the knowledge, skills, and educational philosophies of students who are interested in the coaching profession. Every course complies with the coaching standards of the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and features project-based-learning. Students must complete two practicum experiences to document their ability to apply what they have learned in real-world settings. As they progress through the program, students must assemble a portfolio of their work to demonstrate that it conforms with NAPSE standards.

COLLEGE NOW (DUAL CREDIT/CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT)

As described in Criterion 1 in the description of SMSU's enrollment profile, SMSU has a significant interest in dual credit throughout the State of Minnesota. SMSU has been offering concurrent enrollment courses since 1984; our College Now program (formerly called Challenge until 2009) is the longest running dual credit operation in the State of Minnesota, and SMSU is known throughout the state as a leader in this area. The high school students taking SMSU classes are subject to the same learning objectives and grading criteria as all other college students. HLC has recognized the growing importance of dual credit in the revised criteria for accreditation and through its work on the national study describing institutional practices related to dual credit ("Dual Credit in U.S. Higher Education: A Study of State Policy and Quality Assurance Practices" published in February 2013). Each SMSU College Now course retains course objectives and learning goals consistent with its on-campus equivalent. Given the emerging impact of dual credit courses nationally and the impact on SMSU's FTE, more depth and context regarding College Now is described below.

History and Definitions

In 1985 the State of Minnesota passed a bill creating the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program which allows Minnesota high school juniors and seniors to take college-level courses that apply to both high school graduation requirements and a college degree. Since 2012, eligible high school sophomores may take certain Career and Technical Education courses as well. Additional information regarding Minnesota's Postsecondary Options program can be found at

<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/CollReadi/PSEO/>. As of 2013-2014, over 80 Minnesota institutions of higher education including two-year community and technical colleges and four-year state and private colleges and universities participated in the program. Any public, nonpublic, home school or American Indian-controlled tribal contract or grant student classified as a junior or senior and accepted by a post-secondary institution may enroll either full- or part-time in courses at SMSU. Students participating in cultural exchange programs are not eligible (<http://www.smsu.edu/admission/undergraduate/?id=5556>).

SMSU makes a distinction between students who choose to leave high school to come to SMSU to take classes and those who take their coursework within their high school setting and classroom. SMSU uses the broader “PSEO” acronym only for those students who leave their high school to take courses at SMSU, in courses with other SMSU students. A total of 674 PSEO students enrolled at SMSU between 2000 and 2012.

Approximately 33% of these PSEO students subsequently matriculated as regular students to SMSU. Yearly PSEO- to regular-student matriculations ranged from 9 to 27 (see t-drive, HLC criterion 4A4, PSEO). PSEO students are subject to the same faculty-stipulated expectations as every other member of the course. In other words, PSEO students have the same assignments, take the same exams, and participate in the same class activities as ‘regular’ college students. PSEO students are assessed the same as their class cohorts. Faculty do not differentiate between PSEO and regular students for assessment purposes. Institutional data, however, show that PSEO students maintain considerably higher SMSU GPA’s (average=3.14) compared to SMSU undergraduates (average=2.89).

SMSU also delivers college courses in the high school setting in what the University calls its “College Now” program. While technically this is a specific type of PSEO program under the state definition, generally University members do not use the “PSEO” label to refer to these students. CN classes have been accepted all over the United States and the world, from such institutions from the University of Minnesota to Harvard, Yale, and Oxford. As of 2012-13, SMSU partnered with 97 school districts, offering 425 courses around the state and generating 30,403 credits from 4,736 unduplicated students (see breakdown by ‘smsu CN # high schools and enrollment in t-drive, 4A4). These statistics represent an eight percent increase (2,408 additional credits) from FY 12. The program revenue has continued to increase as well, as reflected below:

- FY 2010 \$1,246,043
- FY 2011 \$1,217,658
- FY 2012 \$1,314, 242
- FY 2013 \$1,418, 071

In August 2009, SMSU’s College Now Program applied for national accreditation with the National Association of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). The Program received its notice of accreditation approval in October 2010. The accreditation process materials can be accessed with permission at <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/collegenowaccred/setcookie.cfm>. NACEP accreditation represents a significant transformation for the program both in policy and function. Due to the rigorous accreditation process, SMSU has enhanced the integrity of the program, increased staffing, and improved offerings to better serve our partnering schools (<http://www.smsu.edu/academics/collegenow/?id=5396>).

Ensuring Consistency through Teacher Training and Mentoring

Each academic program ensures that the requirements, grading standards, and other course elements are the same whether the course is taught on campus or through College Now. However, given the nature of dual credit, in which the course is delivered in a high school setting, methods used to achieve the learning goals will differ, and in most cases, students in the high school setting will likely experience more clock time in the course compared to a college section. In order to maintain consistency, SMSU faculty mentors work closely

with their assigned high school instructors, and the College Now program provides additional professional development for the high school instructors.

College Now classes are taught by qualified high school teachers and supervised by SMSU faculty members. All high school faculty must undergo a screening process as determined primarily by the relevant SMSU academic department and secondarily by the College Now Director. Each high school CN teacher is supported by an assigned SMSU faculty mentor. SMSU faculty mentors have historically worked closely with their high school counterparts to help each teacher navigate the requirements of the high school while delivering the SMSU curriculum. However, a change in the faculty assignment and compensation model has helped to standardize expectations across the University. Prior to 2011, faculty load was determined by the number of students assigned to the faculty member, rather than the number of high schools and thus teachers that the faculty member worked with. For every 50 students enrolled, the SMSU faculty member assigned to work with them received three credits of load. For example, an SMSU faculty might have worked with five schools that each enrolled ten students or with two schools that each enrolled 25 students. Regardless, the faculty member was expected to work with each high school teacher individually. Beyond the minimum expectations of the CN program to visit each school site at least once and preferably twice, it was up to the departments to determine how to support the high school students and teachers, depending on what was appropriate for the discipline. For example, SMSU English faculty would teach a lesson in the classroom when they visited and they co-graded two of the required papers for every student in the English composition courses, in order to make certain that the grading was appropriate for college-level writing expectations. In addition, they reviewed all final grades.

In 2011, the faculty assignment and compensation model was changed to assign faculty by number of schools worked with rather than number of students enrolled, creating a model based on faculty mentoring of the high school instructor rather than working directly with students. This necessitated changes in some departmental requirements for what their SMSU faculty provided. In the English example, while English faculty still grade some of the student papers, they now grade only a selection as part of a norming session with the high school teacher, as well as provide feedback on any paper or question a high school instructor has. This shared faculty mentor model has decreased the disparities that arose when assigning work load by student rather than by school.

To ensure quality of classroom instruction by CN high school teachers, SMSU faculty mentors engage in a variety of methods. The faculty member is responsible for overseeing the teacher and the course from a distance including site visits, virtual site visits, regular communication via Facetime, Skype, e-mail, phone and so on, approval of course syllabi, and sample checking of tests, papers, and other coursework. CN high school instructors must agree to take part in the mentor relationship. New CN teachers are required (since 2012) to attend an orientation workshop, part of the one day College Now Summer Workshop (described further below). Furthermore, CN teachers are encouraged to engage in at least two significant professional development activities each year. Enhanced training and professional development opportunities are a priority for the future. While departments on campus hosted College Now teachers in meetings by discipline occasionally in the past, a College Now Multidisciplinary Workshop was offered in August 2012. Due to the overwhelmingly good response, this workshop was expanded to a one day "institute" in Summer of 2013 with more workshop choices and peer networking opportunities. The workshop was expanded to include both new and experienced CN teachers and provide a venue for discussion of content and exchange of ideas and pedagogies that enhance student learning. (The schedule for the 2013 CN Summer Workshop is available in e-resources.)

The College Now website (<http://www.smsu.edu/academics/collegenow/>) has been developed and continues to grow. It now contains a wide variety of resources in electronic format. Resources for students, teachers, high school administrators, and supervising faculty are clearly and logically organized for ease of access and function. Enhanced online resource pages were created for several courses to improve information options for high school teachers, including the following examples for English 151 and Lit 120: <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/collegenow/?id=7634>. College Now surveys are conducted via SurveyMonkey which is linked from the SMSU College Now website.

Resources and Support for the Program

The growing size and importance of College Now has been met with increasing resources. While originally registration was handled by staff in the Distance Learning department and each academic department then made the necessary faculty mentor assignments, the growth in the program and the desire to pursue NACEP accreditation led the University to appoint a faculty member to direct the program for a half-time reassignment in summer of 2008. Duties and expectations continued to grow. The appointment of a full-time College Now Director was made in January 2011. The size and importance of the program clearly necessitated a full-time director. Collection of accreditation materials, maintenance of records, and continual assessment collectively will be enhanced under the supervision of the director, creating a stronger presence in the state. Based on the growth and success of the College Now Program, an additional staff person was hired at the end of the 2012-13 school year to continue to grow the program, improve registration and day-to-day operations and solidify the program as a national leader in concurrent enrollment.

A College Now Committee started Fall 2012 to provide the director with additional support, guidance, and ideas. Previously there had been several College Now task forces over the years, but the standing committee status of the advisory committee will ensure stability and ongoing feedback to the program. The committee is made up of the CN Director, five faculty from different programs with experience in and knowledge of CN offerings, and one additional appointee. The charge of the Committee is to discuss common problems and issues related to the CN Program. These topics include but are not limited to those arising with teaching, CN administrative oversight, the compensation model, academic standards, access to library research, assessment, the plan to offer AA degrees via CN, and on-campus training of CN teachers.

In addition to the formal support described above, the College Now program has also benefited from working closely with the library and Registrar's Office, ensuring that all College Now students have SMSU IDs and full access to library materials. Students and high school instructors also have access to direct library support and tutorial sessions as well. College Now classes that are able to visit campus meet with a librarian for a library review; SMSU librarians have even provided live webinars on library information for schools at a distance. SMSU faculty and their high school teachers can also utilize Desire2Learn (D2L) for course management software if they choose to do so. Students with disabilities have access to many of SMSU's disability services including certain auxiliary aids, support services, and consultations on academic and programmatic access issues. The SMSU Writing Center has also been able to expand into online tutoring, and any student, including College Now students should they choose, is able to access this resource. Programs are seeking other methods of involving CN students and teachers on campus. For example, the Science Department brought in 120 CN science students to attend presentations at the annual Undergraduate Research Conference; this was an option extended to schools that were able to find funding to bring their students to campus.

Over the past few years, comments made by principals, counselors and teachers consistently agree that the College Now offerings raise expectations for students and provide rigorous college coursework. The College Now program has set goals for the future as well, including the following:

- Increase conversion rate of College Now students to SMSU full-time students through promotion of College Now scholarship and public relations efforts
- Identify continued opportunities to better serve the 19-county region of southwest Minnesota
- Expand assessment of high school teachers as well as CN students
- Determine viability of expanding CN to more high schools throughout Minnesota
- Identify additional SMSU courses (and associated faculty) to be part of the CN program
- Become Minnesota's Concurrent Education Program of choice

CORE COMPONENT 3B: THE INSTITUTION DEMONSTRATES THAT THE EXERCISE OF INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY AND THE ACQUISITION, APPLICATION, AND INTEGRATION OF BROAD LEARNING AND SKILLS ARE INTEGRAL TO ITS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS.

3B1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.

3B2. The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.

The Liberal Education Program (LEP), SMSU's revised general education program that replaced the previous version in 2008, was deliberately designed to mesh with SMSU's mission and is rooted in a philosophy and approach developed from the ground up by the SMSU faculty. Mandated by HLC to review and revise general education in 2004, the University's development of the LEP has been through the initial transformation process, which lasted five years from inception to completed program; implementation, several years in which the University went through some growing pains as it moved from the ideal and abstract to actual courses and procedures to put the program into action; and the maintenance and assessment phase in which it is currently engaged, as it continues to address and improve upon the original LEP formulation.

CREATING A LIBERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (LEP) ROOTED IN SMSU VALUES

Following SMSU's 2004 HLC review, the Faculty Assembly engaged in a thorough revision of the then-called Liberal Arts Core (LAC) program that formed the foundation of each student's education. Members of the LAC Transformation Committee were drawn from both colleges and represented a broad cross-section of the faculty. The committee engaged in a thorough exploration of general education programs in the United States, both their historical development and the ongoing discussion of general education's place in the academy. The committee collaborated with the Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, visiting the Center, and Center employees came to SMSU as part of the process. Resources from the Association of American Colleges & Universities, HLC, numerous professional meetings and other authorities also informed

the committee's discussions of how best to construct the new program. Making the program consistent with the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MTC) required by MnSCU [[link to MTC](#)] complicated the committee's work and created disagreements within the faculty about how best to comply with the MTC without dramatic changes to course loads in various academic departments.

The Transformation Committee first proposed the learning outcomes that provide the basis for the LEP. Faculty discussed each and voted these forward before beginning work on the curricular structure to support the outcomes. Ultimately, the committee proposed to the Faculty Assembly a comprehensive redesign of SMSU's general education program, which was renamed the Liberal Education Program (LEP). Much of the history regarding the transformation process can be found in two progress reports submitted to the HLC, found on SMSU's HLC website and linked here.

The LEP comprises ten learning outcomes, with related sub-goals, in the areas of liberal arts disciplines, communication, creative thinking, critical thinking, physical and social world, human diversity, moral judgment, citizenship, lifelong learning, and mind, body, spirit. These ten outcomes reflect SMSU's mission to prepare students "as engaged citizens in their local and global communities" and degree programs that are "taught in the liberal arts tradition." Further, the outcomes support the thirteen guiding values identified by the Brown and Gold Task Force that align with the University mission and vision statement. (See http://www.smsu.edu/administration/president/smsu_mission_vision_and_values_9.17.08.pdf for the full text of the mission, vision, and values; see also Criterion 1 Section 1A1 for a full history of the mission revision process that took place in 2006-2007.) The LEP applies across the colleges and schools, not only because all students must fulfill the first two years of general studies coursework in keeping with the dictates of the MTC, but because the new LEP encompasses the full undergraduate experience, with book-end classes that introduce and then ask students to reflect on liberal education, as well as other upper-level LEP requirements necessary for graduation.

LEP CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK

The LEP encompasses not only the first two years of required MTC courses with which it aligns, but also extends into the upper division with core outcomes of written and oral communication and critical thinking, including information literacy, expected to be reinforced.

The alignment of the MTC to the LEP can be seen in the curricular grid passed by SmSUFA (available at <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/liberaleducationprogram/lacstructurefinal.pdf>). As the implementation work of the new LEP began, the System Office required that the system-wide MTC be transparent to all students, in order to ease transfer; thus, the LEP outcomes are embedded into the MTC requirements. All students, in fulfilling the MTC, are meeting many of the ten LEP outcomes in doing so. (See the SMSU academic catalog online <http://www.smsu.edu/catalog/?catalogYear=72&categoryId=548>)

All students (with the exception of some transfers) are expected to take LEP 100 First Year Seminar, which focuses on the critical thinking outcome as well as introduces the importance of the liberal education program, in their first year at the University. LEP 100 classes are taught by faculty from all different disciplines, based on a theme each faculty member selects that lends itself to critical thinking. All students are expected to take their first writing class requirement during the first year as well. By the end of the second year, all students are to have taken their SPCH 110 Essentials of Speaking and Listening class as well. In this manner, all students should have foundational experiences with the core skills of communication and critical thinking, and the introduction to information literacy that accompanies these courses.

The three upper-division requirements are

- 1) a core-focused class in the major
- 2) a major capstone course
- 3) the LEP 400 Contemporary Issues Seminar, the LEP's interdisciplinary capstone course, which emphasizes the creative thinking outcome.

Each SMSU degree program is required by the Liberal Education Program to designate an upper-level required course in the major that revisits the key skills of critical thinking, oral communication, written communication and information literacy. The faculty chose to require this designation, not to add another course to the major, but to ensure that each of these crucial skills would be explicitly addressed at least once in the major courses. The faculty recognized that most upper-level courses require these skills, but not all courses deal with them directly. Some programs have designated a course in another discipline, like ENG 360, Scientific & Technical Writing. Several other programs, including Accounting, Marketing, Political Science, Psychology, Biology and Chemistry, have designated their major Capstone courses for this purpose. Thus it is possible for the major capstone to double-count as the core-focused required class in the major. In addition to revisiting the core skills, most major capstone courses require students to engage in research relevant to their major or their professional interests. History, for example, requires a two-semester sequence in which students explore topics of interest to them and, using accepted historical research methods, develop individual research projects, many of which are presented in the Undergraduate Research Conference.

The LEP 400 Contemporary Issues Seminar is taught by faculty from across the disciplines, and is team-taught by faculty from different disciplines when requested. As with the LEP 100 course, sections of this course are likewise themed (see e-resource files for a list of past course themes). Because the course emphasizes the creative thinking outcome, instructors propose broad themes that require students to engage in problem-solving. Students also reflect on all ten LEP outcomes and how the outcomes have emerged over the course of their education thus far. The addition of this 400-level interdisciplinary liberal education capstone is an affirmation of the importance of liberal education to the University's mission.

LEP OVERSIGHT AND SUPPORT

As finally enacted by the faculty, the LEP is overseen by a committee co-chaired by an elected faculty representative and the Dean of Arts, Letters and Sciences. The remainder of the committee represents both SMSU colleges, the library and Academic and Diversity Resources. This Liberal Education Committee (LEC) oversees the creation of new courses required by the program, acts on petitions for exceptions to the program, coordinates scheduling of faculty members to teach the new courses, and manages assessment of the ten LEP outcomes.

The University has supported this revision into the LEP in a variety of ways. The faculty as a whole have provided many service hours throughout the process. In addition to the membership of the Transformation Committee members and the Liberal Education Committee (LEC) which took its place, faculty from all departments attended numerous open sessions and all-university discussions throughout the process, continuing now with the assessment work. The faculty have been very vested in the program, recognizing its significance. The administration funded a half-time faculty release for a faculty member to serve as the Faculty Co-Chair of the LEC. Then-President Danahar told the faculty to develop the curriculum that enacted the outcomes and philosophy and that the administration would find the funding to support the new structure. Subsequent administrations have followed through on that pledge, working to determine how the new curriculum affected staffing in the different departments and including teaching LEP classes as a

consideration in departmental position requests. The assessment budget will have included funding for duty days for each LEP outcome assessment team, and duty days were funded for an LEP 100 instructor workshop that took place after the LEC reviewed the first several years of that course and brought together the instructors to develop better shared practices among them.

As described in the sections above, the revision and implementation of the LEP has been a very public and University-wide endeavor. Further articulation of the LEP's intent and outcomes continues to take place with the ongoing work of assessment teams dedicated to each outcome (see Criterion 4 for this discussion), annual advising training for all faculty and advisors, LEP 100 classroom discussions on the importance of liberal education and why students are required to take the curriculum, and review of the LEP 400 course now that it has been taught for several years.

3B3. Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

All students experience the ten LEP outcomes described above, outcomes which address the skills listed in this subcomponent. While the LEP outcomes are largely associated with the required MTC courses in the first two years, these outcomes are also present throughout the curriculum of most degree programs. The LEC surveyed faculty to identify which courses from all programs and all course levels reflect elements of the LEP outcomes (the survey results can be found here [link when complete](#)). The findings from this survey are being distributed to each of the LEP outcome assessment teams, so that they can pursue additional assessment evidence beyond the MTC and LEP 100 and 400 classes. (More information on the LEP assessment teams can be found in Criterion 4.) In addition to coursework, several of the LEP outcomes are intended to be reflected in co-curricular experiences as well; Student Affairs offices began addressing LEP outcomes in their annual assessment planning processes in summer of 2012 (again, more information can be found in Criterion 4).

SMSU's efforts in helping students in all programs develop these educational skills extend beyond the LEP indicators. Every program's program review and assessment data, found in Criterion 4, addresses these same components. The annual Undergraduate Research Conference (URC), described in Criterion 1 and below in Section 3B5, has grown each year and encompasses work from 17 different programs across campus. Many of the high impact practices endorsed by the AAC&U, which have been embraced by SMSU in the LEP and many degree programs, reflect this subcomponent as well. The first-year seminar, writing-intensive classes, diversity/global learning, service learning, undergraduate research, and capstone courses all serve to help SMSU students enact the liberal education foundation noted in the University's mission.

[NOTE: NSSE 2013 data might be added here when analysis by the task force is complete.]

3B4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.

As described in Criterion 1, Section 1C, the mission, values, strategic plan, and LEP outcomes all support diversity in many forms at SMSU. In the educational framework, both SMSU's LEP and the system-wide MTC include a human diversity and global learning component, consistent with the University's mission to prepare students as "engaged citizens in their local and global communities." Within the MTC, students may choose from a list of approximately 13 different courses to fulfill the diversity requirement and 28 global-themed courses. The courses are offered in a breadth of areas including History, Literature, Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies, Sociology and Speech. There is at least one course in Education with a diversity topic, but it is

ineligible for the MTC because of a MnSCU rule that Education-prefix courses cannot be used to fulfill MTC requirements. Results from the MnSCU Consortium question on the 2011 NSSE indicate that when presented with the statement "Faculty use examples of experiences from various racial or ethnic groups in their courses," 70% of first-year students and 66% of seniors agree with the statement, closely matching the state-wide numbers of 73% and 69% respectively. [[link to 2011 NSSE consortium chart; update with 2013 when possible](#)] All students can choose to further pursue their diversity and global interests through the Global Studies program offerings, and conversely, partnerships with several international universities provide roadmaps for their students to continue coursework at SMSU (described in Criterion 1 Section 1C). SMSU is home to a broad array of co-curricular activities that bring together students from diverse backgrounds or share information about cultures different from that of Southwest Minnesota. SMSU's student population is diverse, with students from Africa and Southern Asia. SMSU international students pay in-state tuition rates but receive no financial aid. As described in Criterion 1 Section 1C, the University takes seriously the need to retain diverse staff and students and recognizes that diversity is an important component of education. Coursework, co-curricular activities and the conversations one hears walking down the halls all demonstrate the attention to human diversity at SMSU.

3B5. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution's mission.

Per SMSU's mission and position within the MnSCU system, teaching and faculty attention to students are considered priorities, but scholarly endeavors are also required per the MnSCU-IFO contract. SMSU faculty carry a 24 credit, generally 4-4 course load. Faculty are required to write Professional Development Plans (PDPs) each year or every two-four years after tenure and promotion, in which faculty address how they intend to achieve the five performance criteria of teaching effectively (or other assignment), scholarly or creative achievement or research, continuing preparation and study, contributions to student development, and service to the university and community. In the PDP process at SMSU, faculty can designate what percentage of their total work each of these efforts will take. The contract provides for a broad range of scholarly contributions (see Appendix G of the IFO-MnSCU Master Agreement for a list of examples).

Faculty members and students across the campus are actively engaged in scholarship and creative work. Recent examples include articles published in scholarly journals such as the *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, *Journal of Differential Equations*, *Science Educator*, *Consciousness and Cognition* and *Revista de Estudios Sociales of the Universidad de los Andes*; books or book chapters including creative work such as Prof. Neil Smith's *All the Young Warriors* and Prof. Judy Wilson's *Trespass* as well as contributions to books that included *Philosophy and Breaking Bad*, *Applying Core Ethics to Business*, *East Asian Social Movements: Power Protest, and Change in a Dynamic Region* and *Mnopedia*, the new online encyclopedia of Minnesota. Faculty across campus attended and presented at numerous professional meetings. Closer to home, SMSU's Faculty New Work presentation series brought our own researchers and writers before our students and other members of the campus community. Recent topics included "E-Publishing" by Prof. Neil Smith, "Seeking Jane Austen" by Prof. Jim Zarzana and "Storytelling Disclosure in Corporate Campaigns" by Prof. Rick Herder. (A full list of New Works presentations can be found in e-resources.)

As described in Criterion 1 and referenced in Section 3B3 above, SMSU students take part in an annual Undergraduate Research Conference (URC) that began in 2006 and has grown every year. On December 4, 2013, 223 SMSU students participated in the 8th annual Undergraduate Research Conference. Student presenters delivered 48 oral presentations and 98 posters. Another nine students showed their original art. Participating students represented all parts of the academic community, including Accounting, Ag Business,

Art History, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Exercise Science, Political Science, Speech Communication and Theatre. Selected campus presentations were included in the Research in the Rotunda display at the Minnesota Capitol in February 2014, and at MnSCU's statewide URC held at MSU Mankato in April. In addition, Accounting, Education, Science and other programs host poster sessions for student research projects in late April and early May. In just seven years, the URC has grown from a few dozen projects by science students to more than 200 students from all corners of the campus.

Another example of student engagement in research is the Culinology students' participation in the national Research Chefs Association Culinology Competition. In the last several years, SMSU teams have won first- and third-place honors while competing against programs which are much larger, older and better-financed. The creative work of students can be witnessed through multiple examples: Hospitality students have planned and prepared dinner theatre meals in conjunction with main-stage theatre productions for ten years, winning high praise from theatre-goers; the Theatre program produces three main stage and at least one blackbox presentations each year; and radio/TV students have produced and broadcast more than 120 original programs, including live sporting events, newscasts and interview programs, with the KSSU Radio and KSSU TV stations maintaining regular broadcasting schedules with programs developed and produced entirely by the student staff.

CORE COMPONENT 3C: THE INSTITUTION HAS THE FACULTY AND STAFF NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE, HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS AND STUDENT SERVICES.

3C1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.

The faculty at SMSU have always supported the institution's mission by providing high quality curricula that enhance student learning. The faculty provide students with excellent teaching and other learning engagements that prepare them for global opportunities. Individual departments and/or faculty have established various assessment tools for their programs or courses. Specific programs, including Distance Learning and Graduate programs, have full-time faculty and staff, and also work study and in some programs, graduate assistants to accommodate demands for services, information and program support.

The number of faculty over the past ten years has decreased in terms of FTE faculty; the student-to-faculty ratio has also slightly decreased, indicating that the decrease in enrollment has slightly outpaced the decrease in numbers of faculty.

The decrease in numbers of faculty is due in part to retirements as well as cautious hiring in light of economic conditions. Over the ten years since the last HLC review, 34 IFO faculty members retired, and not all of these positions were rehired. In FY04, there were a total of 142.35 FTE faculty. In FY14, there were a total of 136.61 FTE faculty. While the total number of IFO faculty has decreased, the number of probationary FTE faculty has increased, and the percentage of fixed term faculty (those on one-year contracts) has decreased after a high of

19.53% in fiscal year 2011. In FY04, 24.69 FTE (17.34%) of the faculty were on fixed term positions compared to 19.79 FTE (14.49%) in FY14. Table 3.3 shows the number of faculty searches conducted each year since 2004; the table demonstrates that overall, probationary positions have outpaced fixed term contracts, lending some stability to the faculty workforce despite the downturn in number of FTE positions overall.

TABLE 3.3 IFO FACULTY SEARCHES 2004-2014

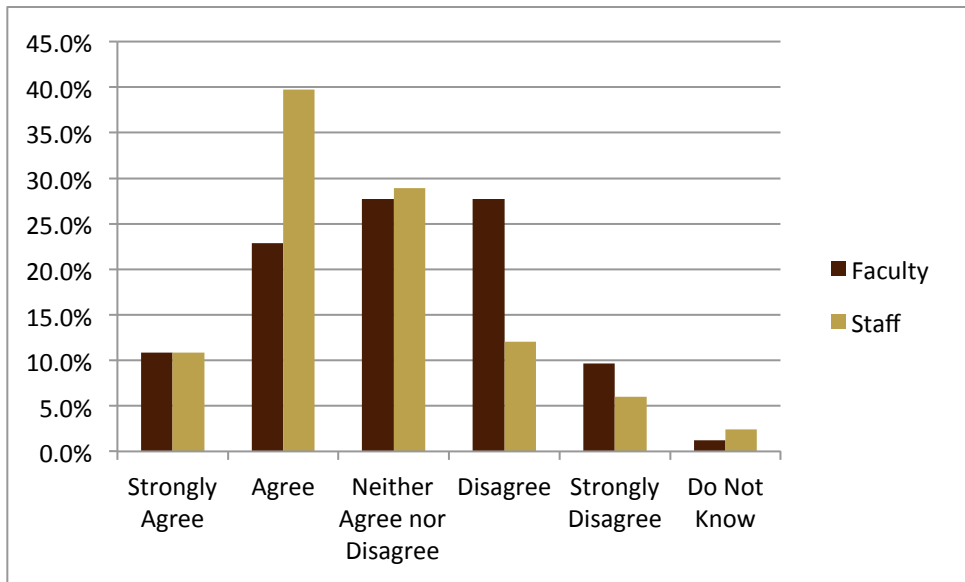
Fiscal Year	No. of Searches	Fixed Term	Probationary	Athletic 4 year FT
2004	12	4	6	2
2005	13	4	8	1
2006	15		14	1
2007	21	2	19	
2008	18	3	12	3
2009	7	5	2	
2010	6	3		3
2011	16	13	2	1
2012	5	4	1	
2013	12	3	9	
2014	16	5	10	1
Totals	141	46	83	12

As noted above, the student:faculty ratio has also decreased, largely due to lower undergraduate degree-seeking student enrollment. Because faculty teaching graduate students cannot be easily separated from those teaching undergraduate students (often faculty teach both graduate and undergraduate courses), the student:faculty ratio is calculated by including all faculty and all degree-seeking students. Over a ten year span, using Fall 2003 and Fall 2013 data (AY 2004 and AY 2014), there has been a roughly 8% drop in degree seeking student FTE and a 4% drop in Faculty FTE. This creates a student:faculty ratio change of roughly 19:1 down to 18:1 when the numbers are rounded.

In addition to the IFO faculty positions described above, 10 MSUAASF members retired, which allowed the University to eliminate or change the majority of these positions. In FY04, the MSUAASF group consisted of 58.43 FTE employees with 55.6 FTE in FY13.

As part of the HLC Self-Study Survey conducted in Spring 2013, faculty and staff/administration were asked the same question regarding perception of having a sufficient number of faculty. Figure 3.1 shows that the groups had different perceptions:

FIGURE 3.1 COMPARISON OF FACULTY AND STAFF/ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT “THERE ARE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF FACULTY MEMBERS IN EACH PROGRAM.”



While how individuals answered might have depended on whether they were thinking of a specific program, the broader result that the overall faculty perspective does not match the staff perspective is not surprising. A review of faculty position requests from the past few years show that Departments always perceive a need for more faculty, in that they submit more requests than are usually funded, and the faculty must staff a large number of not only University committees but faculty-initiative committees (see committee lists on the SmSUFA web site), and thus must meet service obligations as well as support students and their own research agendas in addition to their teaching load.

In terms of sufficient numbers and continuity, the data supporting this subcomponent will be slightly in flux at the time of the HLC review team’s arrival and will be updated at that time. The number of faculty will be affected by contractual procedures that were enacted in Spring 2014 regarding possible retrenchment and discontinuance of programs, as the University deals with a severe economic shortfall due to enrollment projections not being met and insufficient funding from the state, including underestimated salary increases in bargaining units’ contracts.

3C2. All instructors are appropriately credentialed, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.

About 84% of faculty members hold the terminal degree in their field. Any faculty member employed by the University must undergo a stringent hiring process and meet the qualifications proscribed by the position requirement (see Criterion 2 Section 2A). SMSU Distance Learning programs are appropriately staffed. Faculty for Distance Education courses are, for the most part, recruited from the campus roster of eligible instructors as part of their contracted course load. Periodically, eligible adjunct instructors are employed on a limited basis. Staffing methods are generally the same as in traditional programs, with qualified faculty being selected by the department and the dean. Faculty hired specifically to teach online courses must have relevant experience and/or training prior to teaching online. As described in the College Now (dual credit)

section above in Section 3A4, the College Now Program is based on a mentoring system, similar to that of the relationship between a professor and teaching assistant on the college campus. The teacher of record is the SMSU faculty member, the credentialed instructor responsible for insuring the integrity, rigor, standards, and grading rubrics, and for entering the final grades into the SMSU system. Departments working with CN accept properly vetted high school teachers into the program. Many of the CN teachers have masters degrees, discipline-specific graduate level coursework, and years of teaching experience. All teachers interested in teaching in CN go through an application process which includes submission of resume/vitas, letters of recommendation, and copies of all transcripts (undergraduate and graduate). The individual academic departments they will be teaching for make the decision on who is approved and who is not.

On-campus and MnSCU resource collections are available for faculty who develop online courses, and each year during Professional Development Days, training sessions are offered, with content determined by requests from faculty. Professional development funds provided to each faculty member may be used to attend training, meetings, conferences, or other opportunities related to distance learning instruction. At the system level, MnOnline offers access to collections of articles, tutorials, and Web workshops for use by faculty. There are many opportunities for additional professional development.

3C3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.

In accordance with the established Master Agreement between the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Board of Trustees and the Inter Faculty Organization (IFO), faculty are evaluated for continuing improvement in teaching, in other student interactions, in the quality of scholarly activity and other service to the university and community, as referenced above in Section 3B5. The evaluation processes are intended to be supportive of a faculty member's desire for continuing professional growth and academic excellence. This process contributes to various personnel activities and supports the interest of each faculty member to achieve continuing professional growth and to pursue the highest possible level of academic excellence.

The five criteria for evaluation are listed below:

- Demonstrated ability to teach effectively and/or perform effectively in other current assignments
- Scholarly or creative achievement or research
- Evidence of continuing preparation and study
- Contribution to student growth and development
- Service to the university and community

During the fall semester, each faculty member, after consultation with their immediate supervisor (Dean and/or Athletic Director/designee), prepares a professional development plan (PDP) for the period to be covered by the evaluation. The PDP includes specific objectives, methods, and expected achievements in respect to the criteria listed above. At the completion of the plan, the faculty member provides a copy of the plan to his/her department members through the department chairperson. The appropriate Dean, his/her administrative designee, or other appropriate supervisor will comments on the plan. These written comments provide information to assist the faculty member in his/her professional development and, if applicable, provide guidance with respect to personnel decisions.

At the end of the evaluation period, the faculty member prepares a report and sends it to their supervisor as described above, together with appropriate documentation describing progress made in respect to achieving

his/her objectives as specified in his/her professional development plan. A copy of the report must be sent to all the affected departments through the department chairperson(s). Department members are encouraged to provide written comments on the report to assist the faculty member in his/her professional development and, if applicable, provide guidance with respect to promotion and/or tenure. These written comments will be forwarded to the faculty members. The faculty member will then meet with the Dean and/or Athletic Director/designee to discuss achievements made during the evaluation period. A written summary of the Dean's and/or Athletic Director's/designee's assessment of the faculty member's accomplishments in respect to his/her plan, as they relate to the criteria, together with suggestions to guide future professional development activities, and any upcoming application for tenure and/or promotion, shall then be sent to the faculty member and placed in the faculty member's official personnel file.

The evaluation process and submission of materials proceeds according to a schedule determined by the President after the faculty association has been provided an opportunity to meet and confer concerning implementation of the procedure.

3C4. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.

The MnSCU – IFO Master Agreement contains a provision for professional improvement. Professional improvement funds are support funds for improving professional competence. All members of the IFO faculty except adjunct faculty are eligible for the funds. After meeting and conferring with the Faculty Association, SMSU President establishes procedures and criteria for the application and awarding of these funds to individual faculty members. Awards are made by the President. Three forms of faculty improvement grants are available: Professional Study and Travel, Sabbatical Leave, and Faculty Improvement Grants.

PROFESSIONAL STUDY AND TRAVEL

The IFO and MnSCU recognize the need for faculty development relating to their university's mission. Therefore, each department/unit is allocated professional study and travel funds. The departments, through a democratic process, determine an equitable procedure for distribution of funds. Funds provided by this section are limited to paying for costs associated with the process of faculty development. Permissible uses include, but are not limited to, the cost of travel, housing, meals and registration associated with participation in professional conferences, workshops, and similar meetings and courses, professional memberships, professional books and journals, supplies and services including Internet access, online services including electronic subscriptions, software, multimedia, and fees associated with the publishing of professional writings including preparation services. Professional study and travel funds are available to all faculty members at the time of hire.

SABBATICAL LEAVE

The purpose of a sabbatical leave is to enhance professional development, support department/unit goals, and/or meet the instructional, service, or research priorities of SMSU. The President/designee may grant a sabbatical leave to an eligible faculty member who proposes to undertake a scholarly research project, additional study, or other endeavor related to professional development. To be eligible for sabbatical leave, a faculty member must have completed at least seven (7) years of service at the university, or have at least six (6) years of service since the conclusion of such faculty member's previous sabbatical leave.

The granting of sabbatical leave is contingent upon the President's determination that funds are available for this purpose and that staffing requirements of the university can be met. However, according to a provision in the master agreement, the faculty member shall be granted a sabbatical, upon request, after either, a year of service following an initial award of tenure, or completion of ten (10) years of service, and thereafter upon request after ten (10) years of service following the conclusion of the faculty member's last sabbatical leave. Should more than twenty-five percent (25%) of the faculty basis of any particular department or program be eligible for and request such a leave, the sabbatical(s) shall be granted in accordance with the following priorities: (1) faculty who have not yet received a sabbatical; (2) faculty whose sabbatical was postponed by this provision; (3) faculty with the longest service since their last sabbatical.

Sabbatical leaves may be granted for one (1) semester, at full base salary, or for a full academic year at eighty percent (80%) of base salary. For part-time faculty members, the amount of sabbatical pay shall be adjusted pro rata.

FACULTY IMPROVEMENT GRANT (FIG)

FIG funds are established by MnSCU to support faculty in fulfilling their professional development criteria of continuing preparation for study and scholarly or creative achievement. Faculty members may apply for the grant and receive up to the maximum potential grant each biennium. The current maximum amount is \$800.00. Each faculty is not automatically allotted \$800.00. Grant may be pro-rated depending on the number of qualified applicants. The FIG request must specify whether the activity fits into the category of continuing preparation and/or scholarly/creative achievement.

The President, after meeting and conferring with the Association, shall establish procedures and criteria for the application and awarding of these funds to individual faculty members. Awards shall be made by the President during the year of the biennium, and from one biennium to the next.

MSUAASF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Minnesota State University Association of Administrative & Service Faculty (MSUAASF) members are eligible for Administrative and Service Faculty Improve Grants (PIF) for projects that enhance the administrative and service faculty's professional competence while giving support to the mission of the University, with four funding cycles available annually. Like the Faculty Improvement Grant process, the President determines the final awards after receiving input from the MSUAASF grant committee.

3C5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.

Faculty members at SMSU are expected to make time to answer to students' questions outside the classroom. According to the IFO-MnSCU contract (Article 10, Section A, Subd. 2), each faculty member is responsible for ten (10) office hours weekly for assisting students, at times and approved locations, either on or off-campus, and posted at the faculty member's office for faculty members with assigned offices. A faculty member who is assigned to work from a remote location shall maintain equivalent interactive availability to students through the internet or other electronic means. If a faculty member's assignment includes teaching load at an off-campus site, a portion of his/her office hour obligation can be met at the off-campus site.

In exploring data related to this subcomponent, it became evident that the different survey materials available do not directly address this particular issue of accessibility. The NSSE survey asks how much

students go to their professors, but this is not the same as how accessible or available the professors are. The SMSU Senior Survey administered to all graduating seniors asks about the accessibility of advising, but this too is different than the broader question of student inquiry. Through the process of the self-study, the need to develop a method to gather data related to this subcomponent has been identified.

3C6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.

Every unit in Student Affairs has specified minimum qualifications for each position. In each search, job openings are advertised with reference to these qualifications. The search process is designed to guarantee that the individual hired meets at least the minimum requirements for the position. Once hired, staff members undergo an annual review process appropriate for their position.

Ongoing training includes scheduled professional improvement days that involve all staff members. Professional Improvement Grants are available to support training activities. Every unit within Student Affairs develops their own plan and schedule for continuing training.

Staff members who work with student tutors maintain their own training based on their specific development plans. Student tutors are therefore trained and supervised by well-qualified staff members who are current in their fields. Tutors in the Writing Center complete a formal course before working with students in the Center ([link to syllabi](#)) and participate in ongoing professional development through regular staff meetings and participation in professional conferences. Students who tutor in the Academic Commons are chosen based on their own success in the program for which they tutor. These students frequently sit in on the introductory classes for which they tutor and regularly work through homework assignments independently before students in the course see the assignments.

CORE COMPONENT 3D: THE INSTITUTION PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING.

3D1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.

SMSU supports students through a broad range of services, which are conveniently located throughout campus and are advertised to students through formal programs, residence halls, referrals from advisors, and hallway posters. These services include the Career Services and Counseling Services, Health Services, Financial Aid Office, Diversity and Inclusion, Residence Life, the Writing Center and the Speech Center. In addition, the Office of Student Success (described in Criterion 1 Section 1A2 on student support) was organized in academic year 2011-2012 to address issues related to retention, and thus frequently acts as a portal to help students identify the specific types of support they need. The Office of Student Success coordinates the Early Alert System used by faculty and staff members to notify them of any concerns they have about a student's performance, provides programming on helpful tips for students, and employs and

trains “Mustang Mentors,” upper-class students who are partnered with first-year students to provide one-on-one help and advice.

Career Services supports students throughout their college years as students decide on a major and potential career path, then create and implement a plan to achieve their career goals. Staff members encourage students to take advantage of online and print resources to help identify possible careers and explore the preparation necessary to enter them. Programs and presentations help with interview skills, resume writing and other essential skills for finding employment after college. Although it is not a placement office, Career Services does support students through mustangjobs.com and other online job-hunting resources.

Counseling and Testing Services offers assessments to students for stress, anxiety, depression, relationship issues and a range of other complications commonly faced by college students. Short-term counseling is also available for students who need more than an assessment of their issues. Test proctoring includes services such as the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exams, College Level Examination Program and the new 2014 GED for potential students and local residents.

Health Services provides free and confidential services, including medical evaluations, for registered students. There is a small fee for laboratory tests, certain medications, supplies, and sports physicals students might also require. Health Services also assists students with off-campus referrals as necessary. The Health Service is also central to SMSU’s promotion of itself as a smoke-free environment.

The Student Financial Aid Office provides fair, equitable, and unbiased service to students seeking financial aid. This supports the mission of the University by helping students find financial means that enable them to enroll in and complete their academic programs. The office guarantees delivery of federal and state financial assistance to students within rules and regulations established by government authorities. The Student Financial Aid Office coordinates all federal, state, and institutional financial assistance, including grants, scholarships, student employment, and student loans.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion seeks to ensure that all SMSU students receive the quality education for which they have come to the University. The Office recognizes that students from underrepresented and underserved populations face challenges and roadblocks that are different from those faced by other students and works, through outreach, educational programs and speakers, to help each student find the appropriate path and strategies to succeed at SMSU.

Residence Life focuses on helping students develop positive communities for living, learning and working on campus. Residence Hall Assistants are trained and supported with the goal of integrating each student into a network of peers, so that each student develops the relationships and life skills that will help them graduate on time and retain a lifelong connection with SMSU. “Living & Learning Communities,” co-ed residential communities organized around either an academic or a special interest, are also available to enhance the overall resident experience by grouping students with similar interests in the same house. Living & Learning communities available in 2013-2014 were centered on Culinology; Access, Opportunity, and Success (AOS, described further below); Fine Arts; and Mustang Traditions.

Both the Writing Center and the Speech Center rely on trained students for staffing and organization. Students can make an appointment for a consultation, either in person or, in the case of the Writing Center, online. During the consultation, a trained and supervised student assistant will work with the student to take the next step in preparing a finished writing assignment or preparing for a speech presentation. This peer support helps students grow in their ability to compete assignments or prepare speeches effectively.

The Academic Commons area was established in 2005 as study center where an array of student academic support services are located together in a central, visible, and academically-identified location to facilitate seamless access to services for SMSU students and education resources for the wider community. The Education Department Learning Center, Math Lab, and general academic tutoring in many subjects are all located in the Academic Commons, as well as a 24-station computer lab and other resource material and project supplies.

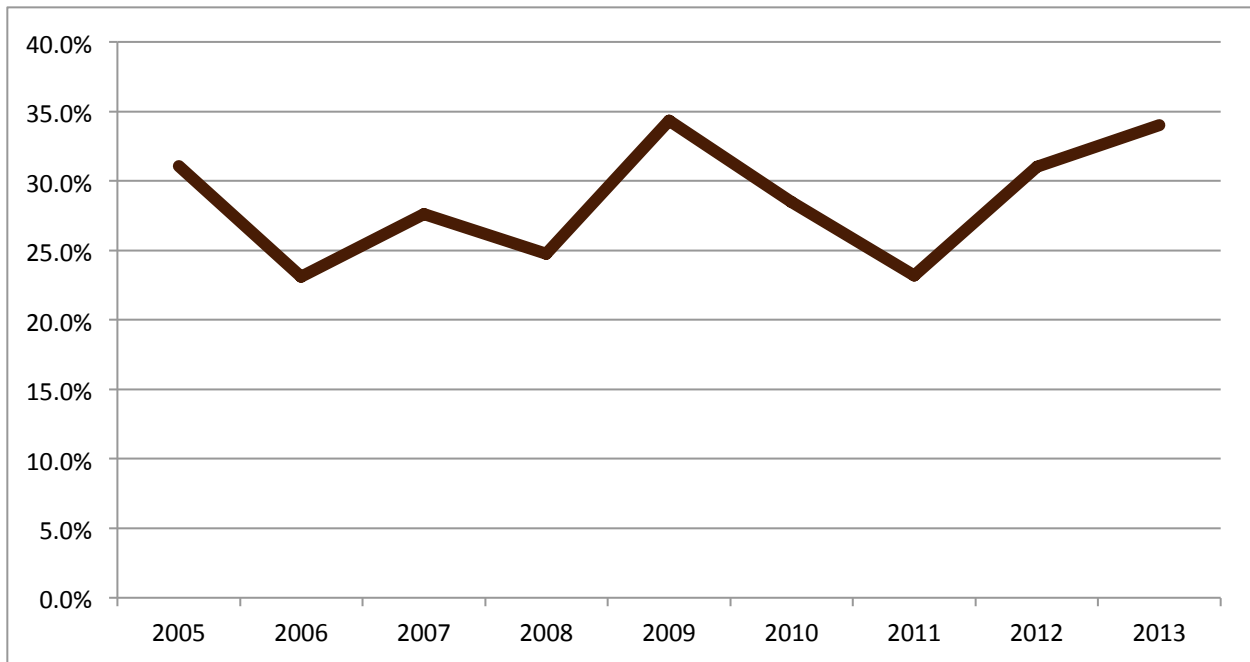
3D2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.

All SMSU students have access to appropriate support services for their needs, with many of those services tailored to the type of program in which the student is enrolled. Many of these services are described above in Section 3D1. In addition, some student populations receive more targeted services. These include Honors students, provisionally-admitted students, students in the AOS program, and student-athletes, as well as expectations for all entering first-year students.

The Honors Program is described in Criterion 1, Section 1A2. The Honors Program provides exceptionally well-prepared students the opportunity to create their own Liberal Education core, with a foundation of Honors classes, and student receive support from an Honors advisor.

Since a number of students enter SMSU on a provisional admission, it is necessary for the University to provide services and support to assist these students in becoming successful college students and graduates. Figure 3.2, New Entering Freshmen (NEF) Enrollment by Provisional Admission Condition, shows that of the undergraduate degree-seeking students, anywhere from 23% to 34%, depending on the year, are provisional admits. While the criteria for provisional admittance can change, they have stayed the same for the past three years. Provisional admits are generally students who scored below the 21 composite score on the ACT requirement yet have done well in high school. They are usually required to interview. Students 21 years or older who have not taken the ACT are often admitted provisionally and require the Accuplacer to determine the college readiness. The Accuplacer is not an entrance exam but used for advising/placement purposes. More information on admission requirements can be found on the Office of Admission's web site: <http://www.smsu.edu/admission/undergraduate/?Id=5536>

FIGURE 3.2 NEW ENTERING FRESHMEN (NEF) ENROLLMENT BY PROVISIONAL ADMISSION CONDITION



Students who are provisionally admitted are directed into the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). In this program, provisionally-admitted students are advised into specific first-year courses both to help them develop the academic basis for continued success and to help them understand what it means to be part of a college community. These students receive academic advising from staff members who are trained and experienced in working with provisionally admitted students as well as from faculty members in the academic areas for which students have expressed an interest or have declared a major. As a condition of enrollment, provisionally-admitted students also take IDST 110, The University Experience, a 2-credit course created to help them transition successfully into college life. Many of these students are encouraged to utilize the resources on campus described earlier in Section 3D1.

As described in Criterion 1 Section 1C2, since 2008 there has been reorganization related to underrepresented, underserved, and first generation students, related to shifts in grant financing and retirement and other personnel factors. Some of this restructuring also affected the staffing and reporting lines of the EOP. Learning Resources, which had been the designated department to work with provisional admits, had also been home to TRIO Student Support Services (SSS), TRIO Upward Bound, Disability Resources, First Year Experience, and Access Opportunity Success (AOS). The Office of Cultural Diversity was added at the end of the 2007-2008 academic year, and Learning Resources was then renamed the Academic and Diversity Resources Department (ADR). At the end of the 2008-2009 year, the Director of ADR retired, and following the year after, SMSU's application for the federally-funded 2010-2015 TRIO SSS program was not selected to be funded. During this period of transition, the different offices were reassigned to different supervisors. One outcome of this is that the EOP program is now overseen by the Director of the Academic Commons, who reports directly to an academic dean, the Dean of ALS, rather than indirectly to the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs. A second outcome is that due to the loss of the TRIO SSS grant, there were staffing reductions and changes, culminating in one staff member (the Director of Academic Commons)

remaining as the sole advisor. In what is perceived as a beneficial outcome, given that the one staff member could not advise all of the EOP students on her own, provisional admit students are now assigned two advisors. In the required IDST 110, attention is focused on helping these students understand advising and the LEP outcomes, and many of the students transition to a faculty-only advisor once they declare a major, although the Director of the Academic Commons is still available to them whenever needed.

Access, Opportunity and Success (AOS) is a state-funded program designed to help create the conditions for success with students who are low income, first-generation college students, or are students of color. Students in AOS are provided access to tutorial or supplemental instruction, and those who have a Pell Grant are eligible for a housing fee waiver. Freshmen and sophomore students in the program receive priority (early) registration. Entering freshmen have the opportunity to participate in the Summer Bridge program while sophomores are eligible for the Boost Your GPA Summer Bridge program. In addition, all AOS students have the opportunity to live in the AOS Living and Learning Community in the residence halls, mentioned in Section 3D1 above.

Student-athletes also receive support intended to help them succeed academically and personally. All student-athletes, regardless of whether they are regular-admits or provisional-admits, are required to take the IDST 110 course as well, which places an emphasis on life skills. Each athletic team requires their student-athletes to participate in study tables each week. Student-athletes that are in need of additional academic support are referred to the institution's student academic support services and/or disability services office. Each head coach and fulltime assistant coach is trained and assists in the academic advising process for student-athletes. Student-athletes attend an annual meeting to review the NCAA, conference, and institution eligibility regulations along with signing required consent forms. The Athletics Office maintains a Student-Athlete Academic Affairs drop-in office for student questions and concerns, and helps student-athletes achieve their academic, athletic and personal goals. (The Student-Athlete Handbook can be found online at http://smsumustangs.com/documents/2013/8/12/2013-14_SMSU_Athletics_Handbook.pdf?id=3342)

All entering freshmen are advised into a core group of courses that form the basis of SMSU's Liberal Education Program (LEP). The First-Year Seminar (LEP 100) and Academic Writing (ENG 151) in particular are designed for students who are new to college and are ready to study writing and critical thinking in a supportive yet demanding environment. Course placement sheets for all new entering students have been developed to assist advisors for English, Mathematics and Study Skills course placement. Writing and Mathematics placement is based on the ACT subject scores, Accuplacer exam scores, previous college coursework, and high school preparation courses documented in the student record system. Placement in the Studies Skills development course is based on recommendation from the Office of Admission. In the case of the writing course placement, initial placements are double-checked with all instructors of ENG 151 and ENGL 100 (Introduction to Academic Writing) conducting and scoring a first day writing samples in all ENG 151 and ENG 100 sections and advising students if they appear to be in the best course for their needs. (Two samples of Placement sheets, one for a provisional admit student and one for a regular admit student, can be found in e-resources for reviewers.)

In various ways, SMSU provides 2+2 students the necessary student and support services. Off-campus students have access to student affairs offices already described such as Admission, Financial Aid, and Registration. 2+2 Coordinators travel to the Community and Technical colleges to collaborate with local staff as well as to meet and advise students. All students are assigned advisors who are available to assist them in reviewing and planning their degrees. Also, very important to the 2+2 students' academic success is the SMSU Library Off-Campus Access that provides students with access to Library Resources from off-campus.

3D3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.

SMSU has a proud tradition of providing registration and other advice to students through one-on-one meetings with their academic faculty advisors. During the academic year, two complete days are set aside for faculty advisors to meet with their students in individual appointments. Some departments choose to advise in a single room with students speaking with any faculty member in their academic program; other programs require students to sign up for advising appointments with their specific academic advisor. In either case, the advisor has access to the student's academic record in the form of their Interactive Degree Audit Report (DARS). This document allows the advisor to see which degree requirements have been completed and which the student still needs to satisfy. These conversations frequently raise broader issues related to a student's program of study. In these cases, faculty members make additional appointments with students to complete the discussion.

Incoming students also register with the advice of a faculty member. In the spring and summer, SMSU hosts a series of advising days on which admitted students receive orientation to campus and meet at least one faculty member from their expected major area. Over eight or more days of such programs from April through August, 30 to 40 faculty members receive training and updates on the Liberal Education Program, required courses, limitations on enrollment in specific courses and other important elements of providing thorough advice to new students. The training takes place immediately before each advising session so faculty can give the best, most accurate advice to each incoming student.

An Undergraduate Advising Task Force has been in operation for several years to make ongoing improvements to the advising practices on campus. Since it began meeting in December of 2012, the task force has enacted a number of improvements and has several more ready for discussion with the various campus constituent groups. The task force is charged with the following:

- To review advising as it currently exists at SMSU: a) review policies; b) review available data; c) map current processes
- To study best practices, theories, and mechanics
- To establish outcomes for advising; in effect, a curriculum for advising
- Create a plan for university-wide, effective advising
- Develop training plan and annual schedule, as well as resources for advisors

The group is in the final stages of completion for the first bullet above. A revised advising policy is in the final stages of approval and the advising procedures are ready to be presented to the Meet & Confer process. The second bullet was completed through group sharing of resources and discussion. The third and fourth bullets were completed by the development of a new Academic Advising Guide [[link here](#)], which includes the advising mission statement, advising expectations and outcomes, with a four- year general Advising Plan. The fifth bullet is under discussion in spring of 2014. Action items that came from this group include a change in the Fall Orientation program of replacing the Academic Department Open Houses with a "Meet Your Advisor" activity, additional targeted communications to new students who do not have declared majors, and additional sharing of information from the Registration & Advising Office and the Office of Student Success.

3D4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific

laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

Given the University's age, having been built in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the lack of state funding in the past ten years to address all the requested maintenance needs, some spaces and equipment on campus still reflect the era in which they were originally built. However, despite some of the funding obstacles, SMSU has enjoyed a physical makeover in many of its spaces, including Student Center, the Library, Science Labs, Culinology labs, and the Theater, as well as its technological infrastructure. Overall, SMSU is well-positioned to serve its students' needs through the variety of technologies and physical spaces necessary to provide a quality higher education experience.

Thirty-one (31) of SMSU's fifty-three (53) general classrooms are equipped with smart classroom technology. This technology allows instructors to use the latest news and information available electronically to support their classroom presentations. Every course offered at SMSU also has access to SMSU's course management system—Desire to Learn, an online resource for course materials and discussions to support online courses, hybrid courses with some online activity and in-class courses that use the online discussions, group work areas and online submissions.

In addition to the smart classrooms, there are several technology-enhanced meeting/study rooms and special purpose classrooms across campus. Special purpose classrooms include science labs and specialized computer labs for disciplines like GIS and Graphic Arts among others. Across campus, a total of 12 rooms have been equipped with technology in the past five years.

The campus also has a total of eight general purpose computer labs and numerous stand-up or roll-up computer workstations accessible to students across campus including the Academic Commons, the Student Center and the Library. Together, there are approximately 300 computer workstations available for student use on a daily basis.

The entire campus has access to Wi-Fi so students, faculty, staff and visitors have online access everywhere. Faculty members also have access to video conferencing, web conferencing and an online media management system.

Graduate students have access to a broad range of academic resources to support their coursework in Education and Business. With many graduate students connecting from around Minnesota and the United States, and occasionally from home, wherever that may be, the MacFarland Library's online availability is crucial to student success.

The Technology Resource Center (TRC) is physically located at the center of campus. It serves as the "front door" for the Information Technology Services division at the University. The TRC provides just-in-time responses to questions and issues from students, faculty and staff and strongly supports SMSU's academic mission by minimizing computer downtime and maximizing access to information technology across the campus.

The Geographic Information System provides software for creating detailed maps and other representations of complex data and demographic trends. The plotter allows students to prepare and use full-color posters to display their work.

Between 2010 and 2012, SMSU undertook a significant refurbishing and restructure of laboratory space in the Science and Math building as well as kitchen space in the Individualized Learning building for the Culinary Program. Six laboratories and their related preparation and storage areas, the teaching greenhouse and three food preparation lab kitchens were gutted and rebuilt as part of the project to provide students with the most up-to-date facilities possible.

The SMSU McFarland Library is a primary site at the university where students learn how to use information effectively. By learning how to locate materials to address an information need, discriminate between credible and unreliable sources, and ethically and thoughtfully integrate new ideas, perspectives, and data into their existing knowledge bases, students who utilize the instruction, services, and materials of the Library prepare themselves for the intellectual growth they will experience after leaving SMSU. The Library's ability to support the process of seeking and selecting information is unique, and it offers students a wide array of methods for developing the habits of mind necessary for skillful location, selection, and incorporation of information into their academic, professional, and personal lives, including:

- classroom information literacy instruction
- one-on-one reference consultations, as well reference at point of need via chat, telephone, and text message
- a vast array of potential materials in physical and electronic formats: books, journal articles, audiovisual sources, etc.
- web-based research guides for asynchronous instruction and guidance
- a dynamic website designed to support all stages of the research process
- an active interlibrary loan system allowing easy access of materials outside of the SMSU Library's collection.

In August 2013, SMSU's McFarland Library debuted its new One Search option that allows students to search a broad range of databases with a single set of search parameters. This capability reduces the likelihood that a student will miss finding the most appropriate research materials by running a search in one database but not another. As SMSU has absorbed and reacted to a series of budget challenges since 2000, the library's acquisitions budget has fallen from \$288,128 in the 200-2001 academic year to \$142,000 in the 2013-2014 year. This has occurred in an environment that has increasingly emphasized electronic resources over physical books and has also seen dramatic increases in the costs of those databases.

SMSU's Fine Arts building provides practice space in the form of two large rooms and 10 individual practice rooms. SMSU's mainstage theatre has recently replaced the stage floor as well as the house seats. The Black Box theatre gives student directors a flexible space for staging original works, improvisational performances and other performances. Two large conference rooms in Charter Hall and one in Bellows Academic also provide space for student performances and public presentations. The Whipple Gallery inside the library and the Library Plaza in front of the library offer attractive spaces for displaying student and faculty artwork as well as student research projects. Two large outdoor courtyards provide another option for performance and practice space.

Throughout the 2013-2014 academic year, the Nursing program established 10 clinical practice sites for its students to access as part of their nursing preceptorship experience. The program, in compliance with the Minnesota Board of Nursing, requires nursing students to participate in clinical experiences at a community

health setting to be eligible for the Public Health Nursing certificate. Additional clinical sites are in other healthcare facilities in the Marshall area.

SMSU supports several museums and other permanent displays that are integral to the mission and to SMSU's role in the region. The Natural History Museum focuses on plants and animals, particularly those native to Minnesota. The Planetarium offers Astronomy students an accurate view of deep space and hosts numerous school groups every year. The jointly-funded ADM/SMSU Environmental Learning Area gives visitors a compact area in which to observe a variety of prairie environments and wildlife. The Southwest Minnesota Regional Research Center and the Society for the Study of Local and Regional History is a public records repository and a resource for historical information about Marshall and the southwest corner of Minnesota.

3D5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

SMSU's Liberal Education Program requires students to encounter and address information literacy and the use of information resources in at least three ways. Entering students take LEP 100, the First-Year Seminar in their first or second semester on campus. Each section of the course explicitly addresses information literacy along with critical thinking and written and oral communication. The information literacy element of the course is designed to lead directly into the use of information resources in ENG 151, Academic Writing, which many students take simultaneously. SPCH 110, Essentials of Speaking and Listening, also requires a basic research component. ENG 251, Writing in the Professions, or a similar course is part of every student's second year program at SMSU, and students expand their research skills by researching in their intended field of study. In the third or fourth year, each student takes LEP 400, Contemporary Issues Seminar, and a designated upper-level core skills course, each of which explicitly returns to information literacy and the use of resources. In addition to the LEP foundational research skills, all programs expose their students to the research and methods germane to their field. Library faculty support every program on campus with instruction specifically tailored to instructors' requests, and supports students through multiple means including face-to-face reference desk staffing, online guides, and online chat sessions.

The LEC, librarians, and faculty members involved in teaching the LEP core classes for communication and critical thinking are in the process of reviewing how information literacy is scaffolded through the curriculum. At the end of spring semester in 2013, as an outcome of its first review of the LEP 100 course, the LEC led a one-day workshop with LEP 100 instructors in which information literacy baselines were discussed and recommended. [[link to day's agenda](#)] The library has met with the English Department to discuss how ENG 151 and ENG 251 incorporate information literacy and can build upon what is learned in LEP 100. This remains a work in progress and linked to the LEP assessment teams' upcoming work on the communication and critical thinking goals.

CORE COMPONENT 3E: THE INSTITUTION FULFILLS THE CLAIMS IT MAKES FOR AN ENRICHED EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT.

3E1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.

3E2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.

The connection of SMSU's co-curriculum to the mission is first described in Criterion 1, Section 1D, and much of the information in that section is relevant here. SMSU's co-curricular programs support the mission in two broad ways. Programs like the Center for Civic Engagement, Global Studies and student government are explicitly designed to help students "meet the complex challenges of this century as engaged citizens in their local and global communities." Service learning and student government require students to work as part of a community, whether it is the self-governing student population or the broader community within which service learning takes place. In addition, each of the over 90 student clubs are required to report on their service work in their annual application for funding (see sample applications in e-resources for HLC reviewers); students in these organizations contribute hundreds of service hours in a variety of projects on and off-campus. Other civic engagement activities and programs along with Global Studies' course-related travel emphasize for students the diversity of human culture and broaden the boundaries for students' awareness of significant issues. Student organizations such as the International Student Organization, the Latino Club, and Oyate Club are just a few examples of opportunities for students to share their own culture or to learn about other cultures represented on campus.

Other co-curricular activities are aimed at "connecting students' academic and practical professional development experiences in southwestern Minnesota to the wider world." Through internships, inter-collegiate sports, service learning, several different discipline-related student organizations, Global Studies, and the Undergraduate Research Conference (URC), students explore both professional directions and their connections with the world beyond SMSU's campus and local community. Discipline-specific clubs in the areas of Accounting, Biology, History, Math, Theatre and many others bring students into contact with the professional world beyond college. Conducting research for the URC requires students to tap into the wealth of academic research and apply it to their own issues and projects.

The University is able to demonstrate its claims of supporting the development of students as engaged citizens not only through the opportunities listed above but through the work of its Center for Civic Engagement. The Center, described in Criterion 1, Section 1D, provides a portal for all campus and community constituents to access information and support for civic engagement. A detailed timeline describing the development of and support for the Center since its inception in 2003 can be found at <http://www.smsu.edu/campuslife/civicengagement/?id=8767>. As the report notes, SMSU has been involved with a number of support organizations such as the Minnesota Campus Compact and the AASCU American Democracy Project through the years and has hosted forums exploring the connections between civic engagement and higher education. The Center's web site holds a number of links to resources for faculty and students with examples of a broad range of civic engagement and service learning.

Faculty associated with the Center, in collaboration with the Registrar's Office, have conducted and analyzed a Civic Engagement Survey on campus each year since 2009. This survey, taken by all graduating seniors, measures students' demographics, their participation in volunteerism and other civic-oriented activities sponsored by SMSU, as well as their "civic-mindedness." Civic-mindedness is measured using the Civic Minded Graduate (CMG) Scale, adopted from the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University – Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). The annual data reports for this survey can be found on the Center's web site under the assessment link. (<http://www.smsu.edu/campuslife/civicengagement/?id=2989>) Much detailed statistical analysis is contained in these reports. For example, the 2012 report shows that 245

of the 443 (55.3%) seniors surveyed took at least one class that included some form of community-involvement activity. An even higher percentage of the students agree with statements such as “My SMSU education has given me the professional knowledge and skills that I need to help address community issues” (63%), “My education at SMSU has made me aware of a number of community issues that need to be addressed” (66.2%), or “Through my experiences at SMSU, I am very familiar with clubs and organizations that encourage and support community involvement for college students” (61.1%). The Center and its faculty advisory board are working on ways to use this data and to increase the number of engagement opportunities for students.

[possibly cite NSSE results here if relevant and once the task force reports on the 2013 data]

CRITERION 3: STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengths:

- The redesigned Liberal Education Program provides a strong educational foundation to support every degree program on campus.
- SMSU was created to fill a need in this part of Minnesota. From the beginning the University has identified unfulfilled needs in the region and developed appropriate responses. College Now, new programs such as Culinology and the RN-to-BSN, our service learning and civic engagement efforts, and the Undergraduate Research Conference are recent examples of this approach to the mission.
- A number of processes work together to ensure currency and quality of programs regardless of location or delivery method.
- The Writing Center, the Speech Center, Academic Commons, formal library instruction in information literacy and Faculty Improvement Grants support overall educational excellence at SMSU, in addition to the services provided by Student Affairs’ offices.
- Specialized segments of the SMSU student population receive extra support developed with their needs in mind.
- The review of advising has resulted in concrete actions and improved processes that support all students’ advising needs.

Recommendations:

- Continue efforts to emphasize the new LEP goals across all campus units and involve all areas of campus in promoting them.
- While the student:faculty ratio supports the premise that faculty members know their students, and contractual office hour requirements indicate that students are likely to find their faculty members are accessible, the University could explore a revision of a survey instrument to determine student perception of faculty accessibility.
- Continue to give consideration to areas that provide direct student support and to explore new methods and technologies to assist with offering this support.
- Continue to carefully monitor and support staffing levels for faculty as well as staff support as the budget allows.
- Continue to explore ways to support the mission’s focus on helping students to become engaged in local and global communities.